THE TEACHING OF HYGIENE IN ARMY SCHOOLS.

By MAJOR ROBERT J. BLACKHAM.
Royal Army Medical Corps.

Hygiene is now a compulsory subject in some civilian elementary schools under the new code, but, as yet, it has not been given as important a position in the curriculum for school teachers as it undoubtedly deserves. At the last annual meeting of the National Union of Teachers it was stated that of the 160,457 elementary school teachers in the United Kingdom only 46.5 per cent. were certificated, and it is believed that, of those certificated, a small percentage only receive any special course of training in hygiene.

In Army schools hygiene is not systematically taught, and it does not form a subject for examination for either schoolmasters, schoolmistresses, or pupils. I have had an opportunity of reading over the examination papers of the last examination for Army schoolmistresses, and was surprised to find that, although a wide acquaintance with English history and purely literary subjects is demanded, no knowledge of general or infant hygiene is required. This is surely wrong, as it must be of the utmost consequence that teachers should appreciate the importance of hygienic rules, and be competent to impart them to their pupils.

The examinations for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd class certificates are sufficiently severe tests in their way; but the military examiners require no knowledge of personal or general hygiene, although it is, surely, more important that a soldier should know the laws of health than the rules of prosody, as physical efficiency is, or should be, his chief aim in life. The education of the soldier in hygiene should not consist, as at present, of a few lectures given by medical officers of units, but should be part of his regular training in school. He should have a good small work on hygiene issued with his school books, and be taught the laws of health as systematically as he is instructed in history and geography.

The only book on hygiene now in use in Army schools is a pamphlet called "Sanitation and Health," which is merely an excellent lecture given in India by a distinguished General. It does not cover the necessary ground and should be replaced by a special manual, or by one of the numerous elementary books on hygiene which are now on the market. The point is that the soldier should be taught from the very beginning of his service that a knowledge of hygiene is an indispensable part of his
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education as a soldier, and it should constitute a subject of the examinations required for every step in his career. This last is all-important, as when a man knows that a subject will form part of an examination for promotion, it is bound to claim his attention in a more forcible manner than if he studies it in a mere dilettante fashion.

Instruction in hygiene now constitutes a part of the routine instruction of staff officers, but it is hoped that before long a working knowledge of the elements of military hygiene will be compulsory for all officers. If this is too much to hope for, the following suggestion might, at least, be adopted:

In regiments, depôts, &c., the executive sanitary duties in barracks are in the hands of the quartermasters. Many of these officers take an interest in this important portion of their duties, but many, again, do not. Now, with few exceptions, these officers alone, among the ranks of the Army, pass from the grade of honorary lieutenant to those of honorary captain, major and lieutenant-colonel without an examination. I propose that an examination for promotion be instituted for quartermasters, and that it should be of the nature of the examination conducted by the Royal Sanitary Institute for sanitary inspectors. This would strengthen the hands of commanding officers in maintaining good sanitation in their lines, as the quartermaster is and must be his colonel's sanitary inspector until my scheme of handing over the entire sanitary arrangements of barracks to the Corps is adopted (JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL CORPS, vol. iv., p. 807). Moreover, it would give quartermasters a real interest in sanitation, and non-commissioned officers aspiring to be quartermasters would take a similar interest in this important subject, as they would rapidly realise that an interest in health matters spelt promotion and advancement.

The Army schoolmaster should above all be compulsorily interested in hygiene. His influence in the Army is great, and I feel certain it is invariably exercised for good; but he should not be merely a pedagogue, he should be a preacher of the gospel of hygiene. He should be himself trained in sanitary matters, and for this purpose I would suggest that a course of practical military hygiene should be added to the curriculum for Army schoolmaster students at the Duke of York's and Royal Hibernian Military Schools, and that military and school hygiene should be a subject for examination for each step in promotion. The very nature of the schoolmaster's calling renders it absolutely necessary that he should have a knowledge of the laws of health, for the health
of his pupils should be as great a consideration to him as their advancement from class to class. Indeed, on the former, to a great extent, depends the latter. To the schoolmaster we must undoubtedly look not only for the mental development of his pupils, but to the improvement in physique so essential to the welfare of the nation.

Without unduly interfering with the present Army school curriculum, I would suggest that hygiene might, with advantage, be substituted for the economic and scriptural aspects of temperance now taught. The former consists to a great extent of statistics, not easily grasped by the mind of the child, and the latter can only be taught to a section of the children, as Roman Catholics are prohibited from being present at the lessons given on this subject.

Inspectors of Army schools should be required to pass an examination similar to the one suggested for quartermasters, and the Assistant Adjutant-General (Army Schools) should have associated with him in his work a medical officer specially skilled in school hygiene.

There is another sanitary matter in which our Army schools might do good, namely, in the instruction of girl pupils in the elements of infant hygiene. Medical Officers of Health are agreed that this should be done in civil schools, and in their Annual Reports for 1905 the Medical Officers of Health of many boroughs make out a strong case in support of their opinion that instruction of this sort should be given as a measure of paramount importance in combating the enormous infantile mortality which is a blot on our modern civilisation. Surely a start in this direction ought to be made in the Army. The children born in the Army are especially the care of the State, as the sons of soldiers almost invariably enter the Service, while the girls nearly always become the wives and mothers of soldiers, yet the ignorance of infant hygiene in married quarters is often only equalled by that which exists in the slums of our great cities.

Much is being done to improve the lot of the soldier living in barracks, but the conditions of life in married quarters have more or less escaped the attention of our military sanitary reformers. The drains and water supply have, of course, received every attention, but the question of individual prophylaxis among military children has been overlooked.

I suggest that the Army schoolmistress should be put through a practical—I had almost said a clinical—course of infant hygiene in one of our Military Families' Hospitals. She should be instructed in:
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(1) The feeding of children; (2) the clothing of children; (3) the hygienic bearings of cleanliness; (4) the laws governing rest and exercise; (5) the principles of ventilation; (6) nursery “first aid”; and (7) nursery cookery. A simple book on the care of children should be placed in her hands, and her general educational training would teach her how to impart her own knowledge in an attractive way to her young charges. The lessons taught in school would be repeated in the children’s homes, and the fruits of knowledge thus disseminated would, I am sure, be soon seen by a diminished rate of sickness and improved individual hygiene in our married quarters.

Practical instruction to soldiers and soldiers’ children in the laws of health involves no material expenditure, and can be productive of nothing but good, but it must be practical. It is useless to fling such sentences as “Indulgence in alcohol is detrimental to the human organism” at your soldier pupil; but instruction in the proper use of a tooth brush, and on the disgrace and danger of spitting, are matters he can understand and may appreciate.

If we wish to produce an intelligent and efficient Army we must educate every soldier, and every possible soldier, or mother of soldiers, in the laws of health. It is useless to deplore the dark pall of ignorance which hangs over the class from which our recruits are obtained. We must make it our business, in association with our civilian colleagues, the Medical Officers of Health, to dispel it.

The engineer and architect work in communities, but upon the physician devolves the far harder task of working on individuals. It is not that we want the Royal Engineers and the military architect the less, they have already done splendid work in improving the soldiers’ health, and have still more fields to conquer, but in the protection of the health of the individual, which is the ultimate design of military preventive medicine, we have work for the whole body of those responsible for military education and training. This is a matter not for the laboratory or the hospital, but for the schoolroom and the barrack and the officers and non-commissioned officers doing duty with effective troops.

It is not implied that any large amount of the school day should be occupied with elementary hygiene, or that any other teaching should be subordinated to it. Its importance, however, warrants its inclusion as a regular subject of instruction. As a pedagogic subject it needs no apology, in that it teaches the pupil to see, to reason, and to remember; it lends itself both to training and instruction, and it possesses high ethical value.